1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5



633 world", i.e. Jesus Christ), indicating the section of the town in which he lives.

C. Appointment to Office and Decision-Making.

576 The feudal social structure led almost invariably to paternalistic attitudes in appointment to office and in decision-making. This attitude continues in remote rural districts as well as in the most modern-appearing state offices in Addis Ababa.

661 644 The feudal lord, having conquered new lands, usually rewarded his most trusted followers with fiefs and connected privileges. For example, the newly-appointed "mälkäña", who may have previously served merely as military orderly to the warlord, as cupbearer and meatcarver, could be appointed to act as liaison officer and administrator of Galla lands, allocating 1/4 of the land to the old Galla "balbat" as "mälkäña" land of their own, and keeping the rest as his own fief. He would continue to make himself useful as tax-collector, foreman on statute-labor for the lord, as general spy for the ear of the Lord, available for any special service at any time. But he had little security of office or of land tenure, both being at the mercy of any caprice of the lord. It was therefore essential for him to spend much time at the court of the feudal lord, bowing and scraping, ever fearful that some competitor, perhaps the former "läräri" the herald who announced decrees and public inquiries,

●661 might gain in favor and edge him out with contrived
644 accusations.

This pattern can still be observed, from the modest court of the sub-provincial governor and local judge, to the palace courtyard of the emperor himself. It is called "dǎj tenāt" (lit. waiting by the gate). The frequency of appearance, in order to remain in good graces, is usually twice a week; more often if a special favor is sought. The place is preferably within a few yards [575] of a spot where the lord (or emperor) will pass. When this takes place, the courtier bows from the hips, very low. This will usually be acknowledged with a small nod. The procedure is considered essential by the aspirant for office, and by the office-holder, for these reasons:

Positive Reasons:

Reaffirmation of continued loyalty;

To indicate readiness to receive orders, pass messages, give information;

To enable the lord to play his paternalistic role (i.e. the lord can and periodically does ask whether the courtier is happy in his job or [576] wishes a new one; ettiquette requires a response of happiness at least for six months after having received a job, even if it was a demotion or an unpleasant task).

Negative Reasons:

To counteract rumors of disloyalty spread by rivals;

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this would almost certainly happen in case of repeated absences;

To remind the ruler from forgetting, or to pretend having forgotten, a position of favor promised to the applicant. This follow-up also indicates tenacity, a positive point.

To keep the ruler from thinking that the office-holder has become so proud and independent that he has forgotten the "father" from whom all good things come.

To counteract plots being hatched in his absence, which would not benefit him.

66/
178 Another old requirement in appointment to office, which now is in force primarily in the district capitals and rural areas only, is the gift, "shum gänzäb" (lit. money for appointment), paid to the chief at the time of application.

Until very recently, the newly-appointed governor-general of a province would decree a "shum shir", a general, automatic abrogation of all office holdings left by the preceding regime; this enabled the new governor to appoint his own followers, courtiers, retainers, poor relations, etc., in office; but in practice he usually reappointed most of the former officials, down to the many "čheqa shum" headmen, on payment of an appropriate "shum gänzäb". In recent years this practice has been curtailed at the upper levels; for both the director-general of the province, and the secretary-general are now appointed by the central government in Addis Ababa.

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But on lower levels the old practices continue, though more subtly and through indirect negotiations.

In decision-making, nothing seems to have changed. The paternalistic attitudes continue, and only very few of the modern-educated young aspirants really hope for and expect a modernization in the direction of greater efficiency. Only European advisors are outspoken on the subject, among themselves. Ethiopian students who return from university study abroad, return immediately to the "dəj tenat" pattern. Twice a week they bow before the emperor as he leaves the High Court. Very kindly he greets them, usually by name, asks each after his well-being and that of his family. Later when a job has been assigned them, he asks whether they are satisfied, sometimes even inviting them to tell him if they are worried about something. The "fathar" role is taken literally on both sides.

Office-holders rarely make even petty decisions themselves. Instead, they take the matter to their superior, who is thus swamped with little details which waste his time. But it enables him to keep control through frequent personal contact and reaffirmation of the superordinate-subordinate relationship, and he in turn does "dəj tenat" to his superior.

Office-seekers in the provincial capital maintain a grapevine service for information on the infrequent return of the governor-general from residence or "conferences" in Addis Ababa. Then they besiege his head-

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5



641 642 quarters by the hundreds, employing messengers to spy out his daily movements and private life that might develop some entrance to him. They even do this when the job has already been given them by a lower officer, for the positive and negative reasons mentioned above. Court orders are usually unobtainable, even by such highly-placed officials as the modern-educated manager of the provincial branch of the State Bank of Ethiopia, without the personal intervention of the governor-general.

Both rural and urban administrations are considerably slowed by this pattern of appointments and decision making, but the old patterns of human relations, and values accompanying and often determining the social organization, can be expected to continue for some time in the future. In this case resistance to change seems complete.

D. The State and the Crown

643 The emperor, "Negusä Nägäst (lit. King of Kings, in the Geez language), used to be primus inter pares, one of several kings whom they had chosen as their superior, or whose military might left no doubt as to his supremacy. At present there is no "negus", and even the "ras" have lost their power together with their private armies. The monarchy thus reigns supreme, theoretically limited only by the voluntary Constitutions granted by

693 was forfeited by the loser. Under the old system a poor man who could not, even with the aid of kinsmen, raise his bet to equal that of his richer opponent, had little recourse to justice except the "abyet".

[661] The old system also left wide opportunities for bribing of judges, for the borderline between a public "wager" and private bribe was thin. In rural areas the pattern of "wager" still persists. But most danya now officiate in the towns, in a "ferd-byēt" (lit. Judgment-House), often an Italian-built administrative building; and the court procedure has taken on a more modern pattern, through the gradual effect of the pressure in this direction from Addis Ababa. His fines may range from [681] Eth$25.- to Eth$500.-; prison sentences from one month to one year.

The "danya" is a regular judge in that he sits in judgment all year long, at regular intervals. Wednesdays and Fridays are preferred, because they are light "fast-days", on which the "mind is not weighted down with food", according to the traditinnal attitude. Thus, time and place and frequency of function of the "danya" are formally established in the judicial structure, and form the broad base of this part of social organization.

(4) The Appeals Judge, "wombär" (or, "wänbär", or "wänbär", lit. seat), does not sit as regularly in the "ferd-byet". Several times a year (at least once) he travels on a judicial circuit, and also accompanies the governor-general on his inspection tours. Tradi-

695 broidered edge of the Shamma toward the face of the
701 accused, or even toward the face of the judge; shouting, in the latter case: "May He (God) make you see clearly! (Egziabhēr yasaywo). While he waves his right hand forward, his right foot thunders forward also, maintaining his position by leaning on the staff with his left arm. Meanwhile, the adversary leans mutely on his staff, as if he were in church leaning quietly on his "maqomya", but indicated nonchalance and indifference toward the raving of the accuser. A method of the defendant to influence the judge with his sincerity, in the traditional way, is to throw his pre-arranged toga off his shoulders, baring them in the middle of arguing his defense, to indicate that he surrenders his shoulders to the flogging that the judge might order, in complete confidence that his innocence must be evident to the judge.

695 Until very recently, and in remote rural districts
661 even today, the wager, or bet on the outcome, was an essential factor in legislation. It took the place of court fees, for the loser forfeited his bet to the judge. This was the salary of the judge. Without this wager, it was not possible to go to court. The poor man was at a great disadvantage since he could not, even with help of his kinsmen, keep raising the bets to equal those of his wealthier adversary. To limit such judicial excesses, Emperor Menelik II decreed that wagers had to consist of tangible items such as honey, horse, mule, with a fixed cash equivalent (Eth$1.-, $10.-, $20.- in this order), and judges were urged to exercise fairness. Prohibition

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5



695 LCI of the practice now often leads to more secret and subtle bribing of the judge. For the old wager was open to the public, and a great source of public recreation and entertainment, accompanied by great noise and flashes of wit.

The danya would gravely enter every wager in his register. While the case was in progress, bets could be raised by signalling from the audience (partly consisting of interested kinfolk) instead of shouting them out, which was not always preferred:

"I agree to be his guarantor" - point finger at accused and strike own breast;

"I bet honey against him" -point finger at adversary and lick palm;

"I bet a horse" - wave both extended hands as if galloping;

"I bet a mule" - hold hands near ear, moving up and down.

The judge had to take into consideration not only the winnings he would take, or the secret reward from the winner of the case, but also the shifting views of the audience. Thus the participating, arguing audience formed a sort of informal jury. Sometimes the danya might actually recess the court and call upon several elders from the audience to consult privately with him, or to help him assess the amount of damages to be awarded.

If dissatisfied with the outcome of the case, the loser might shout his protest "yegbā" (lit. enter me, i.e. on another trial), usually taking it to a high-

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5



er court, if he felt he had the means. In this case the judge might sometimes not appropriate the wager for fear of having to surrender it again later.

There are numerous proverbs characterizing roles in litigation, and counseling behavior and decisions to be made in certain situations:

"The young lawyer,
in the beginning he acclaims to heaven;
later on, he will look to the ground"
(Moral: always choose an old, experienced lawyer, with many reserve tricks up his sleeve).

"Don't seize the tail of the leopard;
but if you did, don't let go."
(Meaning: Don't go to court against a good talker, or "great man", or wealthy adversary; but once started, fight as hard as hard as you can, or else he will ruin you).

"Even if you know how,
against the judge do not debate".
"Judge, why your partiality?
the loser must pay you (anyway)".

"One witness need not make you tremble,
(just as) a one-eyed (person)cannot dance well."

The pattern of the wager resembles, in part, that of the "khabdh" of Arab bedouin.[76]

76. Ibid.

681 According to this change, mutilation of thieves was
178 forbidden; the chaining of debtor to creditor was abro-
671 gated; flogging was reduced in frequency and quantity; the area that could fall under collective arrest, "afär-sata", was limited; the legal validity of evidence from the "lebäshay" was indirectly abrogated. In 1933, the emperor further limited days, hours, and distances of the "afärsata". Capital punishment had been centralized in 1930.

It is noteworthy that in several cases old practices were for the first time acknowledged in writing, despite the continuing hesitancy to admit publicly any practice that European observers might regard as primitive. Thus, blood-money in place of blood-feud was decreed legal in 1930

426 Liberalization was also legalized by regarding
671 civil law. In 1923 the Law of Loans fixed maximum in-
178 terest at 9%. As usual , this was found to be too far a departure from practice for enforcement, and it was later raised to 12%. One of the last decrees prior to Italian hostilities, provided, in May 1935, for the abrogation of statute-labor, permitting the tenant (gabbar) to make a small payment (resembling a quitrent) instead.

694 (b) The pattern of judges riding circuit con-
● 661 tinued unabated, from the end of the harvest in the
178 month of Tahsas (about November) until Easter. Sometimes judicial councils, "gubaé" were available in towns for appeals. But the old custom of bringing a gift to the "great man" to interest him in the indivi-

694 dual's case, the "gubba" gift, continued, and it is often
[66] identical with a bribe. At the same time, the old cus-
178 tom which served as a last resort to a poor person to have his injustice rectified, by appearing with a heavy stone perched on the back of his neck almost crushing him, was abrogated because Europeans looked on this as primitive. The poor man thus has lost his few safeguards, and now is losing even the right to beg and to create a traffic hazard by throwing himself before the vehicle of
[71] the great man and shouting "abyet". (The practice of carrying the rock resembles that of innocently accused Arab Beduin who appear pressing a blade against their necks to demonstrate and shout their innocence.

178 Transition thus proceeds in unequal shifts, with
671 many culture lags. Modernization of law and justice
643 proceeds from the top, Addis Ababa, down the pyramid. One of the reasons for the circuit-riding of the emperor himself is to remind the chiefs of his realm of his all-seeing and all-hearing power, just as was done in the past. He acts as inspector-general.

The Emperor and his High Court in Addis Ababa stil give lip service to the Fetha Nägäst Code. But in practice, this amounts to little more than rationalization for the benefit of the ultra-conservative Amhara nobles.
693 The position of the "afä negus" (lit. Mouthpiece of the King), who traditionally was the guardian of theFetha Nägäst code, has now become honorary in practice. In the past he was the second-most powerful person in the realm, trusted partly because he was not of the ruling family

Often
most of his income is derived from writing "ketāb", amu-
lets on goatskin parchment, worn by ailing persons on
their neck-cord, or by women, in leather containers fas-
tened to belt straps around the waist. The priest do
forbid this amulet-writing activity, which is sometimes
(not without reason) suspect not only of "white" magic,
but also black magic. Let the priests ignore and over-
look this, as they have done for centuries, perhaps be-
cause in this way they obtain the "dabtara's" other ser-
vices free of cost.

The dabtära is often feared by the common people because of his power, both medical and supernatural. In recent years, with the suppression of the "tänkway" witch-doctor, the clientele of the debtara has actually increased, for now there is no one but the dabtara to exorcise "buda" (magic hyena, werewolf) possession, to protect from the evil eye, or to curse and capture thieves. Moreover, it is respectable to go to the dabtära, who operates in the shadow of the church, who associates with holy priests and even drinks beer with them at feasts. No gossip can attach to a man seen entering the hut of the dabtara, for his errand may be decent and even sacred.

Most dabtära reap full benefits from the awe in which they are held. They even transgress etiquette when it suits their purposes. If uninvited at a wedding or other festivity, they often "crash" the party, and expect to be and are given seats of honor and the choicest food and mead.

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793 Parish priests, (unlike mämhər scholars) are also
[86] not bashful about demanding their due (produce tithe,
sheep, honey, even cash) from their tenants of church
land. Sardonic peasant humor expresses this in the pro-
verb:

[539] "The bashful priest,
the blind donkey,
(are one)" . (i.e. both would be helpless and
starve to death).

532 Among artisans who do specialist work for the
346 church is the artist of church paintings, usually highly
colorful and realistic scenes from the suffering of the
saints, in morbid and gory detail; the beauties of hea-
ven and the trinity; the horrors of hell ruled by a chain-
ed, soul-munching Satan; etc. These religious and semi-
religious story illustrations and legends are painted on
canvas and then attached to the inside of church walls.

874 Church students are usually boys 10 years or
over (never girls), who at first learn the Geez-Amharid
alphabet, reading Geez without translating, beginning with
the Epistle of the Apostle John. They are taught by rote,
memorizing by chanting the portions out loud. There is
very little writing in the early grades, and experimen-
tation is traditionally discouraged, for fear that the
boys might use their new-won learning to write magic
amulets. Before examinations, church studetns stimulate
874 their mental processes by eating the leaf of a Datura
276 weed resembling a Jimson weed called "<u>astänaqer</u>" (lit. to
stimulate talk) which is also used by däbtära in exor-

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
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to assist us and order equipment to be given us for our journey, that he forgot all this, and also that he was not mindful of the friendship which they had established and sworn, since he did so little for the affairs of the King of Portugal. Neither on this account did he make any more haste, but always excused himself with his guest, and with being ill. On the 6th of July seven or eight horsemen arrived, very gaily caparisoned, these were Moors, and seemed to be honourable persons, they came from other countries, and brought many very beautiful horses, which they were bringing to pay as tribute which they owed to Prester John and the Barnagais. As the arrival of the Moors redounded to his profit, neither his guests nor his sickness impeded him. The great reception and honour which the Barnagais paid to these Moors gave us great trouble. The ambassador had told him that he wanted twelve mules, and asked him to order them to be lent: he said that he could not lend them, and that we should buy them. When we wished to buy these mules which the people of the country were selling to us, the servants of the Barnagais came and interrupted the purchase, telling the vendors not to sell them, and that if they sold them they would be punished, and the gold would be taken away from them, for in this country money is not current. This happened in such manner that the rumour of it spread throughout the country, and the people told us that even if they wished to sell to us they did not dare, from fear of the Barnagais, because he wished to sell his own mules, and therefore forbade their selling them. (He has another method with the people of his country.) In all the kingdoms of Prester John money is not current, but only gold by weight, and the principal weight is called *ouquia*,[1] and this, which is an ounce, makes in weight ten cruzados, and for change there is a half ouquia, and from twelve drachms to ten make

[1] A gold coin in some parts of Africa.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
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by the Emperor and was his representative in the province. His exact title varied. He might rise to the height of that of *Negus*; he might be a ras. More frequently in recent years he held the next title in rank, that of *dejazmach*. He was the general of the provincial army, the judge and the administrator. He was paid no salary. He paid himself, his entourage, and his soldiers from the tribute of the province. On the pecuniary side, in addition to the tithes and other tribute, he collected the profits of justice and the tolls on the borders of his province. The tolls being collected from the merchants would be one of his few sources of cash, especially before this century.[1]

It has already been said that no estimate is possible of the proportion of tribute passed on by the governors to the Emperor. It seems probable, however, that where any tribute was paid the amount varied according to the arrangements made between the Emperor and the governor and probably also, from time to time, according to the needs and the power of the Emperor and the advisability of appeasing him with tribute. It is certain that large caravans taking rich gifts of cloth, horses, mules, and gold ceased long before this century to come in to the Emperor from any of the northern provinces.[2]

The governor, especially if he were a local grandee, was a very great man. The Ethiopians, like many other peoples, love the trappings of power. It was the ambition of most men to wear fine clothes and to have at least one or two slaves or servants to run beside the stirrup. The governors naturally aimed at reproducing as far as they could the style of the Emperor's palace. They lived at the highest level they could afford, each with a court of his own and a circle of officials of his own appointment, whose titles were current only in the province. When they gave out lands and offices to their followers they tried, like the Emperor, to prevent these becoming hereditary and aimed at unsettling their holders from time to time.[3] Ethiopians tended to gravitate round the households of a great man with its hospitality, its atmosphere of movement, of security and opportunity. The governor's headquarters would be crowded with supporters, suitors, the soldiers of his personal bodyguard, priests, musicians, jesters, servants, and slaves. Upon festivals he kept open house and like his Emperor gave great feasts of raw meat and mead. A description of the lavish hospitality of the Ras of Angote given in the sixteenth century[4] reads almost word for word the same as those of the entertainments described by other travellers 400 years later.

When a governor travelled, especially upon taking up or leaving his appointment, it was a serious affair for the country upon which he

[1] Rüppel, E., *Reise in Abessinien*, Frankfurt, 1838–40, vol. 2, p. 35.
[2] See above, pp. 191–3. [3] Hotten, pp. 145–6. [4] Alvarez, pp. 136–7.

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lived in passing and upon which he could levy purveyance. His passage was an affair of pomp, in which important ladies had to be considered and a retinue taken, which might swell to many hundreds of soldiers and servants with all their families, slaves, and transport animals. Such journeys were veritable expeditions, not to be undertaken lightly. A journey right across the country might take several weeks, and in parts the rains made travel laborious or impossible for some five months of the year. The difficulty of communication gave the governor an independence of which he made full use. Governors of ancient divisions with a tradition of autonomy and governors from the royal family were generally allowed to rule with little interference. In this century the main provincial capitals were connected with Addis Ababa by telephone and this, with aeroplanes, which were just beginning to come into use before 1935, were the first threats to the isolation of the governors, which has since, in most parts, been so greatly diminished by the Italian roads. The Emperor had his agents who kept a watch upon governors and reported upon their doings; this kind of espionage was a highly developed system in Ethiopia. The governors on their side kept representatives in the capital. But this did nothing to overcome what several observers have remarked as the besetting sin of Ethiopian administration, the refusal to take any constructive responsibility. Governors of the old school were mainly concerned with the conservation of their own power, the collection of their tribute, and the fulfilment of their military duties. It would have been quite outside their range of thought to initiate new ideas of reform or to put down time-honoured abuses. Some of the governors spent much of their time at Addis Ababa and their deputies tended to be even more conservative in their use of authority than their masters.

Although the emphasis here is upon administration, it must not be forgotten that the governor was historically and in Ethiopian eyes primarily a high military officer and his civil duties were no more than the necessary accompaniment of his command. He had—as was shown anew in 1935—to raise and lead his provincial army in war. Some description has, however, already been given of the army, and there will be no need to discuss it further in this chapter except in the next section in relation to land tenure.

## THE VILLAGE CHIEF

We have seen that by 1935 it was rare for a great local landed potentate to hold the highest provincial office; in most instances this was held by the Emperor's nominees. But this was not the only link the Emperor

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not the person, it has been said that high notables and the Emperor himself might, in strict technicality, be called *gabars*, since they might hold land burdened with some *gabar* service. Moreover—again in the theory—*gabars* were not, like the serf, tied to the soil; they could leave their land and seek a new holding elsewhere.

The position can be put in another way. The Ethiopian, like the Englishman, owed dues to the central government or to its representative; firstly, he owed the Emperor tribute and tithe for his land; secondly, he owed the equivalent of local rates, and, thirdly, when he was a tenant, he owed rent. The only difference, it might be said, was that the Ethiopian paid all these dues in grain, honey, firewood, stock, or labour instead of in money. The difference was, however, fundamental. In the absence of central control or uniformity and in situations where the *gabar*, the man who provided all this tribute in kind with his own hands, happened to be in a weak position, the form of payment opened the way to all kinds of extortion.

Mrs. Sandford, who with her husband ran a farm for many years in Galla country near the capital and was therefore in a position to provide very authoritative evidence upon this subject, gives the following account of the *gabars*, presumably those in her district. They owed the governor or soldiers to whom they were allotted both produce and services: these might be one day's labour out of three, eight or ten days; the provision of timber for building the master's house and grass for its thatching; firewood and one fifth of the grain crop in addition to the Emperor's tenth. This, she concludes, might have been reasonable especially if the *gabars* could have dared to use their right of appeal. 'But in fact the abuse proved stronger than the system.' The masters exacted more than their due 'and the system was in practice as extortionate as those of old Roman days. Officer and soldier were equally rapacious, . . .' The *gabar* dared not appeal. Coming from a witness of such experience and of such devotion to Ethiopia, this evidence carries weight.[1]

The tithe of grain was owed to the Emperor by every subject unless he were exempted on account of his other services to state or church. This grain was collected on the threshing floors and stored in the governor's official granaries; it was used mainly for the sustenance of the soldiers. Since such a bulky product could hardly be carried far in Ethiopia there was very little market in cereals. Pastoral tribes were expected to pay their tithe in stock. There was also a tribute of produce or labour, or both, which was nearly always taken by the governor or his representative and there were further dues or presents to the sub-

[1] Sandford, pp. 48–9.

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423 when combined they represented the most coveted of all tenures as well as the one most weakening to the imperial authority.

From the different kinds of grant made to the various classes, the governors, the churches, the soldiers and others, for various purposes, arose the many categories of land tenure.

## THE GOVERNOR AND THE LAND

635 651 661 423 The position of the provincial governor was relatively simple. He collected the whole of the Emperor's tribute within the province (in so far as this had not already been granted away by a process which will be examined presently), and he used it for the support of his administration, which meant of himself, his deputies, judges, messengers, and above all, the soldiery. As we have seen in the chapter upon public finance, it is impossible to generalize upon the proportion of tribute which the governor sent on to his Emperor except that it varied with the distribution of power at any given time between the two of them, and in the north might range from the refusal by a distant and almost autonomous governor to send anything but perhaps a token payment to the large tributes in kind and in money which are described by observers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

It is frequently stated in the European accounts of Ethiopia that the office of governor, like all other offices, was sold by the Emperor and by this method, injurious as it was, he would be sure of at least some return. He would also have an interest in frequent changes of office; the governor's interest would consequently be in extorting all he could from his province as rapidly as possible. 'They are generally more like robbers than governors', was the conclusion of one witness.[1] 'The governors purchase their Commissions, or to speak properly their privilege of pillaging the Provinces" concludes another.[2] 'You are governor of Ras el Feel', the Emperor's secretary announced to Bruce. 'I hope you will never see it. It is a hot, unwholesome country, full of Mahometans, but its gold is as good as any Christian gold whatever.'[3]

That these exactions continued into Haile Selassié's day was shown by the measures he took in his endeavours to reform the provincial administration. These exactions would certainly be less in the northern provinces where the governor was dealing with an ancient society, that of his own people, in which all relationships and tributes were sanctified by long established custom.

The governor would parcel out the tribute he controlled amongst his many lieutenants in the districts and amongst his own and the Emperor's

[1] Tellez, p. 53. [2] Lobo, *op. cit.*, p. 263. [3] Bruce, vol. 3, p. 365.



1 [not processed - Analyst]

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soldiers. He would also have, like the Emperor, official estates set aside for the upkeep of his large household and it would be these he would be most anxious to retain if he lost his governorship. For these estates he could call up the labour of soldiers and *gabars*.[1] Parkyns recorded in the mid-nineteenth century that for his estates the governor could exact one day's work for clearing, one for sowing, two for cleaning, and two for harvesting, and this was still the custom in this century.[2] Instead of cultivating his estates directly by using labour in this way, the governor might lease his land to tenants who would pay him a stated proportion of the crop as rent. According to one authority in the north, governors claimed that one tenth of all privately owned land should also be cultivated for him and he would himself choose the lands. Where, as in Tigré, the governorship tended to remain for a period in the same family this was not so grave an injury to the province, but if a governor from outside were sent in the people might not dare to demand back the lands from the local family and were obliged to set aside new lands for their new governor.[3] Besides the governor's estates there would be others attached to the various offices of his assistants.

In addition to their more regular dues from the people it was customary for governors and their assistants to demand special gifts from time to time, such as a sheep from each village at Easter and at the festival of the true cross.

## THE CHURCH AND THE ARMY

The Emperors were always extremely generous to the church, even if they had not gone so far as to allocate that third of the original legend which the famous cleric Takla Haimanot claimed in 1270. Every priest, monk, *debtera*, and deacon, in so far as he was excused from the work of the fields, required that land furnished with slaves or *gabars* should be set aside for his support. A vast total of land was burdened with this service. The piety of Emperors warred here with their political interests—at one moment they were moved to give, at another to resume their gifts. But it was not easy to assert the royal claim against monasteries which were undying corporations or against churches which needed permanent endowment and were, moreover, served by priests determined to pass on their lands with their offices to their sons. Moreover, the very character of the grants protected them. Their most

[1] Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 189–91.
[2] Parkyns, M., *Life in Abyssinia*, 1853, vol. 2, p. 230. Also Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
[3] Rossini, pp. 107–8.

7: Perham S-4 (no date)1948
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## THE NORTHERN PROVINCES: LAND TENURE

The taxation in Gojjam was probably lighter than elsewhere, since, as has just been explained, soldiers were paid here by means of exemption from taxation.

In a study of the system round Lake Tana, mainly in Bagemdir, an Italian writer notes how, side by side with the groups of *restenyas* tracing their hereditary occupation to the first settlements, probably in the fifteenth century, other tenures had grown up. One was that of the *farasenya*[1] to whom the Emperor had made grants of certain privileges and payments amounting generally to about a tenth of the produce of the *restenya* and also the right to exact labour for his land and house and collective gifts upon important feast days. Similar rights, but not including administrative powers, were given to *gultenyas* who, while collecting all the dues owed to the government, had to pay to it an agreed quota of oxen, mules, honey, etc. Thirdly there were the grants of *maskal mariet* (lands of the cross) to the church. In all these cases the rights were often given over the heads of the *restenyas*, who would continue to cultivate their lands as before. As there might be superimposition of new rights over old at the top, there might also be added lower stages by the leasing of land by *restenyas* and others to tenants who would have to pay rent as well as tax.

Side by side with these holders of what may be regarded as private rights would be the hierarchy of the governor. The private rights might cut like islands into the administrative area of his district governors or these might be the *gultenyas* or *farasenyas* themselves and so eliminate the dualism. The *chiqa-shum* who collected the tax would thus pay it either to the *Mislané*, the *gultenya*, the *farasenya* or the *alaqa* (head) of the church. The writer condemns the cumbrousness of this method, with its encouragement of peculation and exactions. The original tax of the people was one tenth of their crop, but the feudal organization had resulted in a multiplication of intermediaries whose great object was to pass on less than a tenth to the government and to exact more than a tenth from the people, enriching themselves on the margin of differences. Those who suffered most were some of the *gabars* who had to support both the church and the *farasenyas*.

An Italian writing of Ethiopian abuses and Italian reforms in 1937 is not likely to underrate the vices of the old system, but there is plenty of comparative evidence, as well as the laws of probability, to suggest that he has not greatly darkened his picture. He states that under the Italian Government, after the conquest, the upper part of the structure[2]

[1] Literally 'horseman' and corresponding, apparently, to the early English 'knight'.

[2] Grottanelli, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 14–15, 105–12.

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had been removed, leaving the heads of villages and districts in direct contact with the Italian resident.

Our third example comes from Eritrea. No excuse is needed for this excursion beyond the present borders of Ethiopia, since the Eritrean plateau was until fifty years ago a part, and one of the oldest parts, of the Ethiopian state, and this region may again revert to its former status. In addition, however, we have the great advantage that Dr. Nadel, an anthropologist of experience and authority, has had the opportunity in this region under the British military administration to make a thorough investigation of a land tenure closely resembling that of northern Ethiopia.[1]

On the Eritrean plateau the most characteristic unit was the *enda*, a number of families which claimed to have descended from a single ancestor. This group was not static; it might decline or be dispersed, or it might thrive and reach a size when it became necessary to break up and form new *endas*. It was not an administrative unit, but in certain matters it acted as a unity through meetings of its elders. The administrative unit, the village, generally covered several *endas*, though these may have all descended from a parent *enda*. The village unit might also cut across *endas*.

Above the village administrations, in the days before the Italian conquest, came the hierarchy of the Emperor, his governors and deputy governors. These were often strangers from the south though local chiefs might be promoted to imperial positions. The imperial taxation had to be delivered to these officers, and the Emperor might arbitrarily cut out estates in *gult* for their support, or for that of monasteries or colonies of soldiers posted in these outlying regions to support the Emperor's power.

These rights may be regarded as extraneous to the underlying customary tenures which are divided by Dr. Nadel into three, ownership by the individual (which generally meant the individual family); by the kindred, or *enda*, and by the village. The first two types of ownership might, owing to the blurring of the edges between the three groups by growth or decline, shade off into each other.

In his discussion of family ownership Dr. Nadel gives us an authoritative definition of *resti*, which may cover ownership ranging from that of an individual to that of a large kinship group. This tenure was held by the people to be the most fundamental and sacred, and its characteristics were firstly its relative absoluteness; secondly its hereditary nature,

[1] Nadel, S. F., 'Land Tenure on the Eritrean Plateau', *Africa*, vol. 16, nos. 1 and 2, pp. 1–22, 99–109. The succeeding pages are closely based on this concise report.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5



impressions conveyed by much of the literature on Ethiopia, is not a normal ecological unit in Amhara society.

Each homestead gives the appearance of self-sufficiency and autonomy, but it is bound to a wider social context in a number of ways. While satisfying most of its consumption needs by its own efforts, every household depends on the market for certain items. The highland peasants must go to market for their chili, onions, peppers, hops, and cotton; while lowland peasants must barter for barley and sheep there. Salt and foreign fabrics must be imported from afar, and iron and clay products must be bought from specialists who bring their wares. Limited needs for currency—chiefly for rifles and, since 1942, taxes—are also met at the market.

The markets normally are held once a week. Every homestead is within walking distance of at least one market; though often the trip may take several hours, at times the greater part of a day. Markets in the same region are often scheduled on different days, so that, for example, the family which misses the one five hours to the north on Saturday can catch another four hours to the south on Tuesday. The virtual absence of roads throughout the countryside makes travel to market slow and tedious, but wealthier peasants nonetheless manage to transport quantities of grain and livestock to the provincial capitals for better prices and a wider selection of consumers' goods.

The household is linked to a wider world politically as well as economically. By providing tithes, revenues, military service, and corvée labor, the peasant has traditionally been obliged to support an extensive political hierarchy. In return for this he has received an organization for defending the country against enemies, and a structure of legitimate authority sufficient to maintain order and settle disputes.

The peasant's relations with this political hierarchy have been mediated by the office of *chīqā shum*, a district headman. This office is circulated, usually annually, among a small number of men whose eligibility is based on their ownership of certain pieces of land. As the land passes from father to son, so does the eligibility for being *chīqā shum*.

Traditionally the *chīqā shum* was a role of considerable importance. It carried the duties of tax collection, adjudication, promulgation of official decrees, supervision of occasional work projects, levying of men for military service, and officiating at civil marriages and divorces. Through his work the *chīqā shum* received a variety of fees and bribes. In cases of flagrant misbehavior the local people were able to dismiss him from office. The reorganization of provincial administration since 1942 has deprived the *chīqā shum* of many of his former powers, but the office still exists and plays a modest role in peasant life.

The district over which a *chīqā shum* has authority is the closest thing to a village unit among the Amhara. It is usually coterminous with the area sur-

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5



who cultivated them being required to hand over a certain proportion of their produce every year.*

A man's "bigness," however, depended more on political authority than possession of land. It was often true in Abyssinia, as in feudal France, that the most powerful lords actually possessed relatively few estates. So long as they were not out of favor, the nobility typically were given appointments as provincial and regional governors in return for their loyalty and services.

The responsibilities of governors at all levels were diffuse. As with the emperor, combined in their persons were administrative, judicial, and ceremonial, as well as military, functions. They were obliged to collect the land tax and tithes of their subjects and transmit the proper amount to the king. They communicated imperial proclamations, announced by beating the *nagārit*, a large drum which symbolized the legitimacy of their authority. They had to judge cases of litigation that originated in their court or were appealed from lower levels. They were expected to keep disturbances caused by bandits in their area down to a reasonable minimum. They had to preside informally on the occasion of religious festivals and to provide large feasts for their followers, and occasionally for the beggars and indigents of the area.

The fact that political position was granted as a reward for military activity, like so many acres of land—or to the highest bidder, as Almeida complained[29]—suggests that the benefits of office outweighed its obligations. Indeed, public authority in Ethiopia was frankly regarded as a private possession by all concerned. The incumbent might change, but the office remained—not so much a set of obligations to fulfill in behalf of the king, or the state, let alone in behalf of the subjects—but a set of opportunities for personal aggrandizement.

The opportunities, both psychic and economic, were impressive. One was expected to avail himself of all the obsequious gestures which serve to swell the ego of an Abyssinian ruler. If so inclined, the governor could indulge his sadism ad libitum; sword, lash, and rope were, besides the *nagārit* and seal, the official insignia of a provincial ruler. He could order the peasants in his area to labor for him—to plow his lands or build his houses—as well as command them to military service. He could exact tribute from them without relief, in addition to appropriating for his family and retainers part of the

* Each land unit worked by a given tenant farmer, or *gubbār*, would be divided according to that proportion, in order to equalize the differences resulting from variation in such factors as the size of land units or the quality of soil. The proportion paid to the landlord varied with the location of the land; thus, one-half might be exacted for ordinary *dīgā* (high) land, while in certain *qolā* (low) areas only a tenth might be required, owing to the difficulties of heat, jungle, and wild beasts.

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taxes collected in the name of the emperor. Concerning the imposts for which the peasants were liable, Plowden wrote in 1844:

> They pay a certain portion in kind to the Ras, or other great chief, and sometimes a regular tax in money; besides this, they must furnish oxen to plough the king's lands. Their immediate governor then takes his share in kind of every grain (say a fifth), and feeds besides a certain number of soldiers at the expense of each householder: he has rights to oxen, sheep, goats, butter, honey, and every other requisite for subsistence; he must be received with joy and feasting by his subjects whenever he visits them, and can demand from them contributions on fifty pretexts—he is going on a campaign, or has just returned from one; he has lost a horse, or married a wife; his property has been consumed by fire, or he has lost his all in battle; or the sacred duty of a funeral banquet cannot be fulfilled without their aid.[80]

Two centuries earlier, observing similar phenomena, Almeida had concluded that "generally speaking, they are all plunderers rather than governors."[81] The only restraints on their exploitative behavior have been an occasionally keen sense of Christian propriety and the limits to what an exasperated local populace will bear.

The existence of a predatory class who serve military functions and maintain a gentry subculture is a common enough feature of traditional agrarian societies. What is perhaps less common in the Abyssinian case is the constellation of factors relating to the recruitment of members into this elite.

High secular status in Abyssinia was dependent on a complex of possessions—land, political strength, and honorific titles—which tended to reinforce one another. The possession of much land has always been a basis for considerable deference in Abyssinia. As a source of produce, rents, and revenues deflected from the Crown, moreover, it was also a source of wealth to be used in building up one's political strength by rewarding able soldiers and loyal followers, and by making gifts to one's superiors. Political power was directly obtained through the acquisition of governorships. Such offices were a further basis for much deference and, through the incumbent's access to tribute, customs fees, court fees, and gifts from his subjects, of much income as well. Titles, finally, not only were universally esteemed but also entitled the bearers to a style of life which included a presumptive right to gifts and obedience from all inferiors as well as the consumption of much wealth and power.

For all these possessions, the Abyssinian noble was directly dependent on his king (or, in the case of a lesser noble, on his overlord). His dependence was twofold: land, political office, and titles came to him as gifts from the sovereign, and, what is more, their continued possession was contingent on the sovereign's continuing favor. Abyssinian "vassals" had no legal rights to their "benefices," and lands granted them could be withdrawn and given to others as the emperor wished. At the death of a feudal beneficiary his lands

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178 So long as they remain loyal, the Emperor has tended to let members of the
565 new nobility help themselves to the spoils of office. Some of them retain the
• 661 view that public office is a private possession, a reward from the emperor rather than an obligation to the nation or people, and that it is, therefore, appropriate to use governmental position primarily to help one's relatives, inflate one's ego, and multiply one's wealth.

178 For the new nobility, however, wealth is no longer measured primarily in
565 terms of land and cattle, but of money. If they own land, it is of interest chiefly
556 as a source of income, and they tend to prefer using it for cash crops like
[241] coffee and *chat* (a narcotic plant sold in quantities to Arabs) than for the
[455] traditional grains and pulse or for experimental crops. They prefer to speculate in real estate rather than to increase the output of their farmlands. Indeed, because of the heightened prestige of money, many officials have been grateful—or would be grateful—for the opportunity to leave government service and become entrepreneurs. They feel very close to that small number of Ethiopians outside the government who have acquired much wealth through commercial enterprise, and who may also be included in the status group of the new nobility.

178 Commercial entrepreneurs came into prominence on the Ethiopian scene
565 in the 1920's, when monopolies in alcohol, matches, salt, and tobacco, as well
556 as trade in coffee and skins, enabled a small number of Ethiopian families,
472 Christian as well as Muslim, to accumulate wealth. Such people became
[175] prisoners of their wealth during the occupation, since they felt obliged to
[648] collaborate with the Italians in order to protect their privileges. Many more Ethiopians have profited from the modest economic activity in the country since the liberation, although most of Ethiopia's trade remains in the hands of Arabs, Greeks, and Armenians (at least nominally). Their social level approximates that of the higher government officials. They are expected to pay their respects at court along with the *mekuanent* and *bäla-siltan*. They
[662] are often related to high government officials, and attempt to make use of their relatives in office to help them secure commercial advantages. Above all, they share the same style of life.

178 As an urban group, the new nobility enjoy a style of life notably different
565 from that of their predecessors who lived on mountainous estates and in army
369 tents. Even if assigned to provincial posts, members of the new nobility tend
177 to maintain homes in Addis Ababa. They have been quick to incorporate the
[556] more conventional urban Western forms of conspicuous consumption. Automobiles and chauffeurs, expensive European clothes, modern houses, Scotch whiskey, and Western-style banquets and dances have become the common ingredients of their subculture.

178 At the same time, traditional symbols of prestige are still in evidence. The
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